

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** April 14, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Seven Sisters Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Three-Year Lease Renewal

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 Min

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### **Background**

Seven Sisters WMA was purchased by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities, primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants. The proposed action is to renew a lease agreement for 3 years on 323 acres of the WMA with Steve Pust. Under terms of the lease, the lessee would harvest a portion of the hay/grain crop, and leave 25% of crops and 35% of irrigated hay standing for wildlife use. The benefit and purpose of the lease would be to provide forage and winter habitat, primarily for pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

The Environmental Assessment for the lease renewal was released on January 27, 2016, with comments accepted through February 17, 2016. FWP received no comments on the proposed lease renewal. FWP issued its decision notice on February 22, 2016 in support of the agricultural lease, contingent on Commission approval.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Under the no action alternative, agricultural lands would not be cultivated and FWP would need to commit resources to manage 323 acres of farm fields, and wildlife would be negatively impacted by the lack of wintering habitat and forage resources. Renewing the agricultural lease would provide cover and forage for wintering wildlife and active management of these fields to control weeds and maintain productivity, mutually benefiting wildlife, hunters, FWP, and the agricultural producer.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the agricultural lease on Seven Sisters WMA, which would provide necessary winter forage for wildlife and promote quality hunting opportunities for hunting.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve the agricultural lease on Seven Sisters WMA as proposed.